

ENDING CHILD LABOR IN THE AMERICAS / FIN AL TRABAJO INFANTIL EN LAS AMÉRICAS



One of the best parts of being Secretary of Labor is seeing how policies and programs impact people's lives and give them hope for a better future. The children who produced the lovely art work and sentiments in this exhibit are fitting symbols for Hispanic Heritage Month. This heritage is full of struggles for those who have suffered or are subject to labor abuses, but also of resilience and achievement when the door of opportunity is open.

Exploitive child labor cannot be tolerated. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty that prevents individuals and nations from reaching their full potential. It jeopardizes children's health, safety and development; it also limits their access to educational opportunities. Education is a key tool for breaking the cycle of child labor and poverty.

In the early 1990s, many of the countries we celebrate during Hispanic Heritage Month – those of the Latin American and Caribbean region – were among the first to recognize and develop programs and policies to combat the worst forms of child labor, often supported by funds from the United States Department of Labor. In 1999, International Labor Organization Convention 182 called for the prohibition of and immediate action to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. At the Fourth Summit of the Americas in 2005, the Heads of State committed to eradicating the worst forms of child labor in the Americas by 2020 by providing quality basic education and building bridges between child labor eradication programs and other social programs.

These efforts and commitment have led to significant results. In 2006, a report by the International Labor Organization highlighted a rapid decline of child labor in the Latin American and Caribbean region since 2000, and raised the prospect that the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in the region can be achieved with concerted effort by 2016, and all forms of child labor by 2020. As Secretary of Labor, I am working with fellow Labor Ministers in the Americas to make these goals a reality. This year, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs will provide more than \$15 million for efforts to combat exploitive child labor through education in six countries throughout the Americas, strengthening regional cooperation and assisting the hardest to reach children who labor under exploitive conditions.

For those of us of Hispanic heritage, these children may be a link to our past, but all of us can be a link to their future. My dream for the Americas is a child labor-free zone. *Yes we Can! ¡Sí se puede!*

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Hilda L. Solis".

Hilda L. Solis, Secretary of Labor